Ludovico Micara
Globalism and Identity in Contemporary Mediterranean Architecture. Opposition or Coexistence?

Abstract
Globalization and identity are concepts too vague to describe the complexity of contemporary architecture and cities. In the past, for instance, some global integration processes turned into distinctive characteristics of particular contexts. The cardo-decuman layouts of the Hellenistic-Roman civilization are now part of the identity of most of the Western, Mediterranean and Levant urban fabrics.

The introduction of bastion fortification systems, as a defense after the invention of firearms, produced new artifacts and urban geometries that radically differ from those that characterized the pre-existing fabrics in European cities and beyond. Today, however, they have become components of new and more complex identities. It is therefore appropriate to take into account concrete instances of proximity and hybridization where the global and the local are intertwined, as it clearly appears in the Mediterranean architectural panorama.

The recent transformations of many cities show a continuous and progressive compromise between global pressures related to modernization processes (new infrastructures, new public or private services …) and resistance that comes from the very existence of identities, traditions, customs, uses still present and alive.

Let us take the case of the Mediterranean world, in which this phenomenon is particularly evident. One of the cultural, religious, anthropological components of this world, the Islamic one, which developed mainly in the southern coast of the Mediterranean and in the Levant, was once viewed as a global imprint on those regions.

When, around the 1960s, we were still talking of "Islamic architecture and cities", Paolo Portoghesi in 1982 decided to name the Second International Architecture Exhibition of the Venice Biennale *Architecture in Islamic countries* (Portoghesi 1982). That represented a profound change because it was then acknowledged that the simple adjective "Islamic" did not cover the complexity of the aspects the world of "Islamic countries" presented in the area of architecture and the city. Likewise, it is difficult today to attribute a unity to the term "Islamic world" if we think of the geographical differences, the historical and social development of the various regions, also in relation to the consequences of colonization and post-colonization, not to mention the different modalities with which globalization has taken place. As a consequence, the cities of Islamic formation incorporate parts of fabric, fragments, environments, still referable to the traditional "Islamic city", as it was theorized at the beginning of the last century, but now amalgamated and merged with the globalized city.

It would be interesting, today, to reconnect, at least virtually, the paths

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Fig. 1
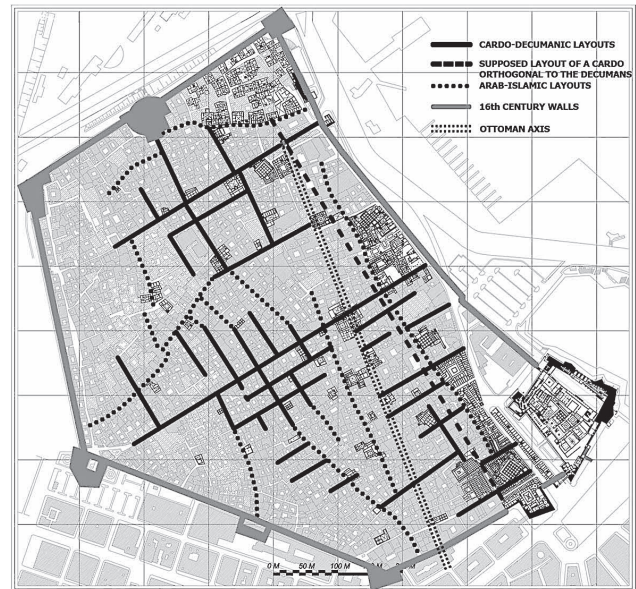Tripoli. Libya: satellite view of the Medina. (DigitalGlobe 2005).

Fig. 2
Tripoli, Libya: historical urban layouts in the Medina (from Micara 2013a).

and the webs of Islamic fabrics beyond the fractures and contemporary transformations, to rediscover how much we still owe to this tradition in designing the identity and character of those cities.

Can we still rely on the historical-sociological analyses by Ibn Khaldun (Monteil 1967 [1378]) which oriented the subsequent studies by W. Marçais (Marçais 1928), G. Marçais (Marçais 1957), U. Monneret de Villard (Monneret de Villard 1966) G. E. von Grunebaum (von Grunebaum 1955), S. Bianca (Bianca 1964) in order to recognize a specific formal structure to the urban spaces of the so-called "Islamic world"? Or should we consider, instead, more recent field studies (Berardi 1979) to understand the complexity of today's cities in Islamic countries?

To this end, we will now analyze the case of the Tripoli's Medina in Libya (Micara 2013a), and the plan for the city of Yazd in Iran (Kowsar 2020).

Tripoli (Libya)

At the beginning of the 20th century, the Medina of Tripoli (Micara 2008a) (Fig. 1) admirably represented most of the characteristics of the Mediterranean cities in Maghreb, namely, a successful synthesis between typical aspects of the Arab-Islamic cities and characters partly extraneous to that tradition deriving from the intense activity of commercial, demographic, religious and diplomatic exchanges with the countries bordering the Mediterranean Sea.

For instance, next to the mosques, the high and pointed minarets that clearly manifest the cultural and religious identity of the city, and next to the dense and compact fabric of courtyard houses and narrow alleys, often *cul-de-sac*, one can perceive elements which are extraneous to the local urban tradition, such as the walls and the castle, with the 16th-century bastions, due to Charles the 5th Spanish globalization, and an unusual opening of the houses to the street.

The uncommon regularity of some roads is also evident (Fig. 2), which, after a more in-depth analysis, appears as a track of the *cardo-decumanus* order, based on the supposed *cardo*[1] and the two *decumanus* of the Roman progenitor of the city, i.e., Tripolis-Oea (The name 'Tripolis' means 'three cities', namely, Oea, Sabratha and Leptis Magna). Some urban characters, such as the breadth and airiness of the court-houses in Tripoli, mainly near the sea and the port and reminiscent of the size of the Roman *domus*, are

Fig. 3
Tripoli, Libya: 19th-century view of the seafront of the Medina from the port.

Fig. 4
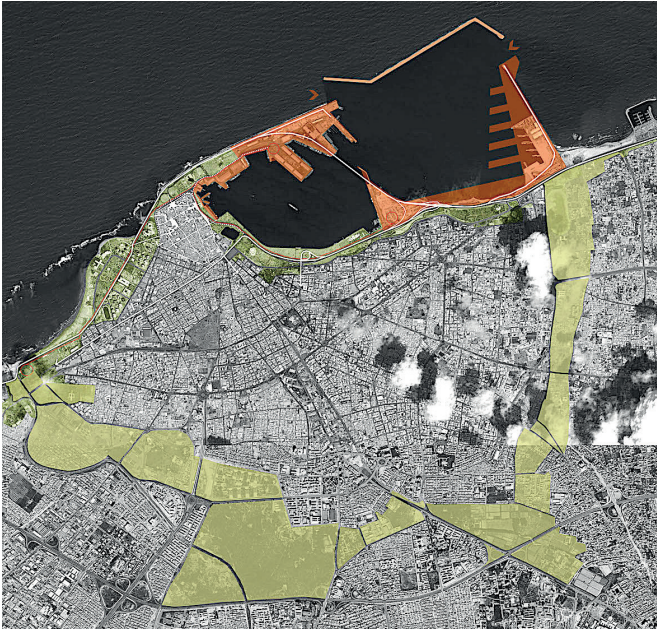Tripoli, Libya: view of the sea front and the port in the 30s of last century.

Fig. 5
Tripoli. Libya: today's view of the sea front; beyond the great road the Medina with the Castle, transformed by A. Brasini, and the past Bank of Libya, also by Brasini (picture Micara 2010).

also noteworthy. Likewise, the presence of the church and the bell tower of St. Mary of the Angels together with the many synagogues, later transformed into mosques, clearly illustrate the multi-ethnic and multi-religious dimension of the Medina in the past.

In addition, the prevailing orientation of the fabric toward the port unequivocally determined the Mediterranean character of the all the spaces of the city (Micara 2009). Today's Medina is therefore the result of a series of rewritings of the traditional settlement, from the Roman to the Arab-Islamic, to the Ottoman one, up to the Italian colonial city, and finally to the contemporary city. These rewritings have transformed an ancient settlement, born as a trading port in a large bay, in the pulsating heart of a metropolis of over one and a half million inhabitants.

This new dimension has completely changed the relationships between the different parts of the city. During Italian occupation, the demolition of parts of the city walls left traces in new streets, which favoured the integration of the Medina with the Italian city of the 1930's, giving rise to an unprecedented "historic center". Thus, the originality of this center results from the integration between a traditional Arab-Islamic urban pattern, based on the court houses fabric, and the early 20th century pattern, based on the typological and morphological relationship between streets and city blocks. Today, this historic core, much wider than the traditional Medina, is still easily recognizable with its architectures, ancient monuments, 20th century arcades, and the buildings of the "new" institutions of the colonial city. However, this integration is far from harmonious. While the attention of the colonizers was all focused on the so-called "Italian city" where the buildings of colonial power were located, and new urban axes were created, the labyrinthine urban fabric of the Medina was left on the background. A still little known and partly mysterious background, abandoned to its uncontrolled transformations and social and religious ways of life, whose presence constitutes however a fundamental component of the 20th century idea of the Mediterranean Levantine city.
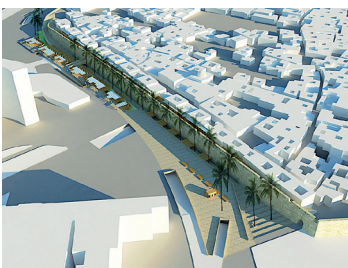
As a consequence of this approach, the most significant transformations occurred in the areas of tangency and contact between the two urban systems and therefore in the edges of the Medina. The demolition of the walls made the resulting void area available for the construction of new streets and new public buildings, while parts of Medina's fabric, close to the edg-

Fig. 6
Tripoli, Libya: project of the new metropolitan dimension of "Greater Tripoli". (L. Micara: elaborated from Clément 2005)

Fig. 7
Tripoli, Libya: project for the new road that runs along the west walls of the Medina. (Micara 2015)

Fig. 8
Tripoli, Libya: a view of the project for the west walls of the Medina (Micara 2015).

es, became the object of the "normalizing" attention by the colonial administration. Even today, the problem of the edges of the Medina is still unsolved, and further aggravated by the presence of new buildings, such as large hotels in the north-western area of the city or new infrastructures, such as the beltway between the Medina and the port, which, by cutting the historical connections between the urban fabric and the sea, even more isolate the Medina itself.

Today's biggest problem in Tripoli is its new metropolitan dimension. If we now look at a satellite image of the city, we can see that its urban growth has taken place without any urban settlement rules, and that the relationship between residential fabrics and public spaces, so clear in the traditional Medina, has been lost.

The only ordering element of the "great Tripoli" is represented by the street infrastructures which partly retrace the ancient tracks connecting the Medina to the inland areas and other coastal centers, and partly define the new urban dimension through even wider ring-roads. In particular, the creation of a great highway, running along the waterfront between the Medina and the port (Fig. 3-4-5), is noteworthy.
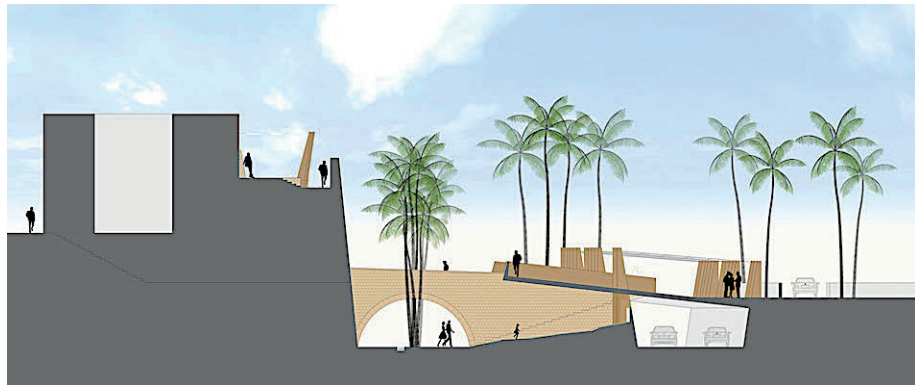
This infrastructure, created to connect the port to the principal arteries of the city, has assumed the role of a great beltway which avoids the city and therefore runs along the seaside. This beltway heavily impacts on the structure of the Medina. What was, since the origins, an urban fabric oriented towards the port, does not find today an access towards the sea, and is now bounded and enclosed within a barrier, constituted by a highway which cannot easily be crossed (Micara 2013b, 2008b).

One of the original features of the urban fabric of the Medina is thus cancelled, which reduces its potential for rehabilitation. In prospect, the displacement of the commercial port towards east, where wider lands and infrastructure facilities are available, might entail the displacement of the beltway or the reconsideration of its relevance, which would leave room for a touristic port, and a possible residential rehabilitation of the Medina. The Medina could thus discover, by enhancing its links with the sea, one of its distinctive characters since its foundation.

In the new metropolitan dimension of "Greater Tripoli" it is however impossible to intervene with partial programs, and a new global strategic vi-

Fig. 9
Top left: Tripoli, Libya: section of the urban park along the west walls of the Medina; on the left, the walls, with the rampart walk at their top; at the center, the promenade along the walls, and, on the right, the underground road and the connection bridge to the surrounding levels (Micara 2015).

Fig. 10
Top right: Tripoli, Libya: current view of the western walls. (picture by Micara 2015)

Fig. 11
Tripoli, Libya: a view of the entrance to the walkway along the wall.(Micara 2015).

Fig. 12
Tripoli, Libya: the walkway along the walls, with shaded rest areas (Micara 2015).
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Fig. 13
Tripoli, Libya: the rampart pathway on top of the walls.
(picture by Micara 2015)

Fig. 14
Tripoli, Libya: the panoramic open market on the rampart pathway on top of the walls (Micara 2015).

sion is needed, likely to interpret the new geographical scale of the city. The urban project of the French landscape architect Gilles Clément (Clément 2005) demolishes a series of degraded and residual fabrics, *délaissés,* in Clément's terminology, integrating the voids resulting from demolishment with abandoned or not exploited areas, to create a large metropolitan belt consisting of gardens, public spaces and services (Fig. 6).

Developing Clément's suggestions, the extremities of such belt could reach the sea, welding also the current harbor with services of urban level in a single linear system. This process would thus reconstitute, at metropolitan scale, the relationship between residential areas and public spaces which is so important for the quality of the urban fabric of the Mediterranean Medina. If, at urban scale, the issue of great circulation raises the problem of the general transformation of the harbor system, in more limited areas it is possible to make the new infrastructures interact with the historical context of the Medina. This is the case of the west border of the Medina, where the ring road runs along the still existing walls (fig. 7). As an alternative to a solution of pure tangency between two entities extraneous to each other, it is thus possible to think and plan their mutual involvement to achieve that integration so characteristic of many Mediterranean urban fabrics (fig. 8).

The discovery of a picture of the Italian colonial period testifies to the presence of a moat along the ancient walls and an entrance gate to the Medina where the former Jewish ghetto was located, named *hara* in Arabic. It is then possible to recover this level, lower than the surrounding ones, to design a walkway and an urban park along the walls (fig. 9-10-11-12).

Making the highway subterranean will allow direct access to the Medina from the surrounding levels, while the rampart pathway on the top of the walls could become a panoramic open-air market (Fig. 13-14).

Yazd (Iran)

At Yazd (Kowsar 2020), an ancient Persian city at the edges of the central Iranian desert (fig. 15), a similar problem, related to the modernization of the historical centers related to new road infrastructures, is also present.
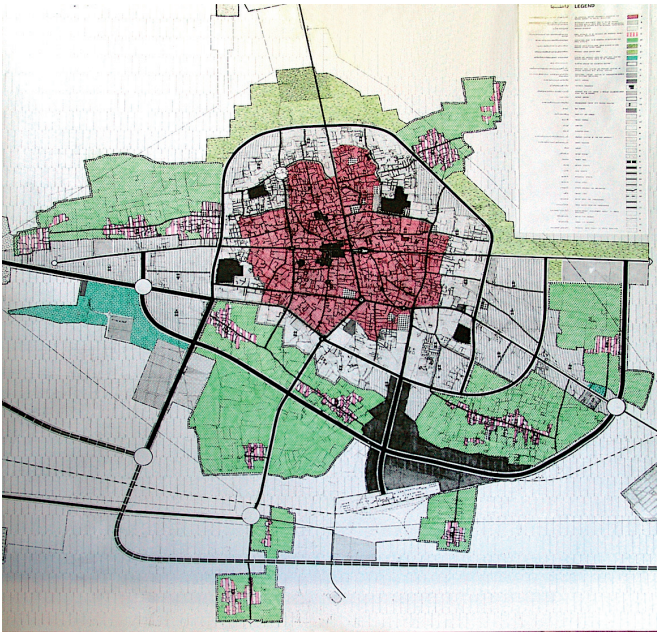
Fig. 15
Yazd, Iran: Master Plan. In 1978, the Plan was awaiting to be adopted, but this never happened. The green color indicates the villages and their farmland around the city. In light green, the proposed afforestation to prevent the advance of the desert. (Kowsar 2020).

Fig. 16
Yazd, Iran: aerial view of the Yazd old center cut by the new roads (Kowsar 2020).

In this case as well, the construction of new roads within the historical fabrics has been a type of urban intervention extensively adopted by the Iranian cities in the last century (Fig. 16). The interaction between the new infrastructures and the original features of an important ancient center would suggest an urban project implementing a new and more complex synthesis between preservation of identity and globalization.

We can distinguish two moments in which these interventions have been carried out in the past. The first one took place during Reza Shah Pahlavi's modernization period (1925-1944), to solve the issue of the access to dense and compact historical urban fabrics of Iranian cities. The second one, more recent, can be traced back to the 50s and 60s of last century, before the principles of conservation and restoration of the architectural heritage, not only related to the so-called "monuments", but also to the historical urban fabric, became established in the practice of urban design. While the "wounds" and "real cuts" produced in urban fabrics by the first demolitions were repaired with architectural systems characterized by continuous porticoed elevations with shops inside, the most recent demolitions are recognizable by other characteristics. For example, we can find random reconstruction of new street façades, or partially demolished buildings and houses, whose ruins, with interior spaces and courtyards, once kept jealously hidden, are now exposed to the prying eyes of passers-by.

The consequences of such "cutting" operations in the historical urban fabric of Iranian cities have had a double implication. The first is the interruption of the continuity of the network of pathways and alleys (*kuché*), historically connecting the houses or neighborhoods (*mahallah*) to the main axis (*rasteh*) of bazaars, caravanserais (*caravanserai*), public baths (*hammam*), religious schools (*madrasa*) and mosques. The strong unity and integration of the traditional fabric is thus broken, in the absence of an alternative settlement model.

The second effect is the loss of relevance of the bazaar, as the commercial traditional center of the city, in favor of new shopping streets, easily accessible by car. As a result, the bazaar has lost its main quality in the past, that was to be the most important public space of the city.

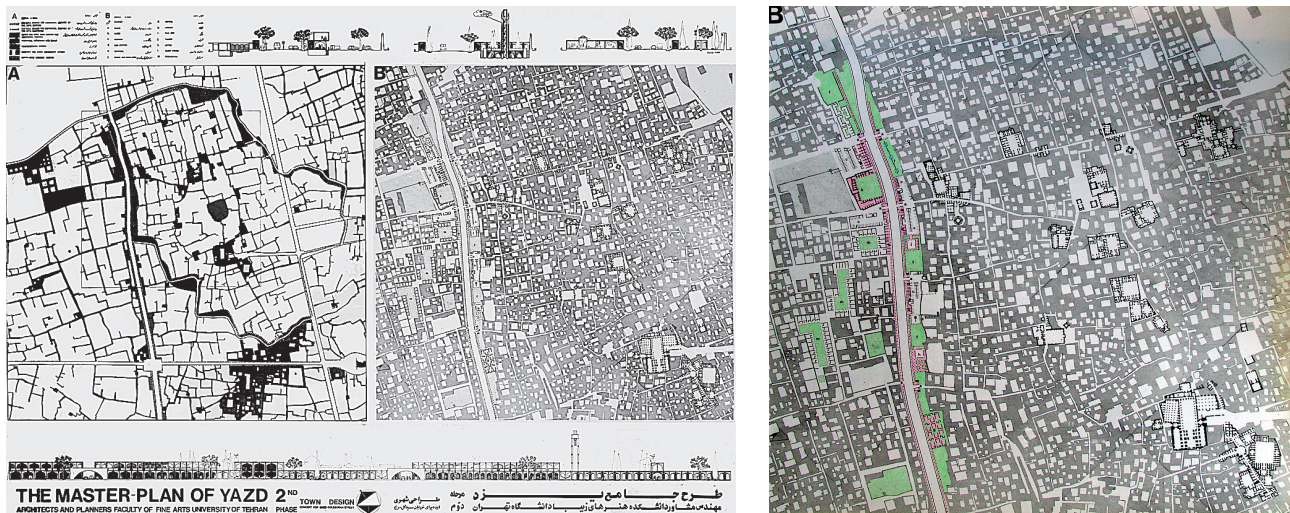The objective of a possible redevelopment project (Micara 2020) (Fig.

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Fig. 17
Yazd, Iran: project of rehabilitation of the ancient center. On the left, the course of the existing walls, the urban structure of the old city and the road plan, implemented after the 1972 demolition. On the right, the design for the Seied Golesorkh street; the project, in addition to proposing a solution for the destroyed urban parts with the integration of new services, redesigns the façades of the street (Kowsar 2020).

Fig. 18
Yazd, Iran: details of the new arrangement of the Seyed Golesorkh street, with the new services integrating the pre-existing ones with the historical urban fabric (Kowsar 2020).

17-18) is therefore not just to define and design the road fronts of new streets, such as Seied Golesorkh Street, but also to take advantage of the demolished areas to organize some services complementing those already present in the historical urban fabric.

The new urban façades have been designed (Micara 2020) by proposing one or two-level porticos, built with prefabricated elements, combined according to various configurations, and interrupted by large arched gates which introduce to the main paths of the traditional urban fabric. The new fronts of the street are not designed as a continuous and compact wall, separating the road from the historical center, but rather as a permeable and "porous" screen, integrating the new urban spaces with the pre-existing ones.

Global Identities: a contradiction?

The subject of a compact and continuous city, respectful of the nature of the cities of the Islamic world, and not resulting from the mere addition of autonomous and isolated buildings, fascinated many contemporary architects.

In *La torre di Babele*, Ludovico Quaroni wrote:

With modern means it is possible that our new unit is not a set of buildings, and not just a building (skyscraper or container). Of the single building it will have the feature of continuity: indeed, it can have it much more, precisely because it will be free from the limits of the body of building, of façades, of the site. Continuity, in a similar architectural subject, is the first and most important characteristic. The continuous building will be able to be crossed, and must be crossed in all directions, and not only horizontally, as we are used to think; it may have a thickness, only that which corresponds to the height of a floor, or that varies according to the different points; it may also generate clusters of skyscrapers; it can be flanked by a road, but it will more probably be distant from a road (highway), or instead it will have it above or below or will be crossed by the road from inside.
For air and light, holes and channels will be made in the continuous building to breathe the free air, all the times that natural light and ventilation will have to correct artificial ones, limited to what it will be needed (little) to maintain contact between man and the alternation of day and night, between man and the clear sky, between man and vegetation, openings. (Quaroni 1967)

How is it possible not to recognize the fascination of the *continuum*, of the "continuous fabric" of the Islamic Mediterranean in the images Klee painted after his trip to Tunisia at the beginning of the 9th century, or in the projects

Fig. 19
M. Safdie, Montreal Habitat '67 (picture by Micara 1970).

Fig. 20
M. Safdie, Montreal Habitat '67 (picture by Micara 1970).

of G. Candilis (Berlin Free University Project, 1963), Y. Friedman (Project for "The Spatial City", 1961), the Smithson (Project of a pedestrian continuous level upon the Berlin central area, 1958) or M. Safdie (Fig. 19-20)?

Therefore, one of the major identity elements of the cities of Islamic formation, namely continuity, can be inspiring for new and more complex urban sets. Isn't the very term "porosity"[2] ("porous" architectures, "porous" cities...), which identifies architectural systems where full and empty spaces are linked together by reciprocity and relationships, a good reference to the characters of the just analyzed Medinas?

Looking at the last images, and back to the title of this paragraph, "Global identities", we may say that the identity feature of the Mediterranean architectures and cities aspires to be global, thus reverting the initial opposition from which this study started.

Notes

[1] The currently accepted identification of the cardo of the Roman Tripoli-Oea, with the long straight road, called Sciara Arba'a Arsat and Sciara Jama el-Druj, raises some doubts. The latter, in fact, is oblique in relation to the axes of the arches of the Tetrapylon of Marcus Aurelius, then center and umbilicum of the city, unlike the decumanus that is perfectly oriented with the axis of the main fornix of the Tetrapylon itself. Moreover, the routes transverse to the supposed cardo are not orthogonal to it, as is usually the case for a Roman cardo-decumanus layout, but oriented like the decumanus. In absence and waiting for archaeological evidence, it can be assumed that the so-called cardo is an Ottoman transformation, due to the destructions made by the Spanish and the Knights of St. John in the urban area west of the Castle, in order to defend and reinforce it against the Ottoman attacks.

[2] Sometimes it is worth going back to the sources and to read again an exemplary text, not written by architects, that, back in 1924, suggested the "porosity" term (Benjamin and Lacis 2020).

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